

• project

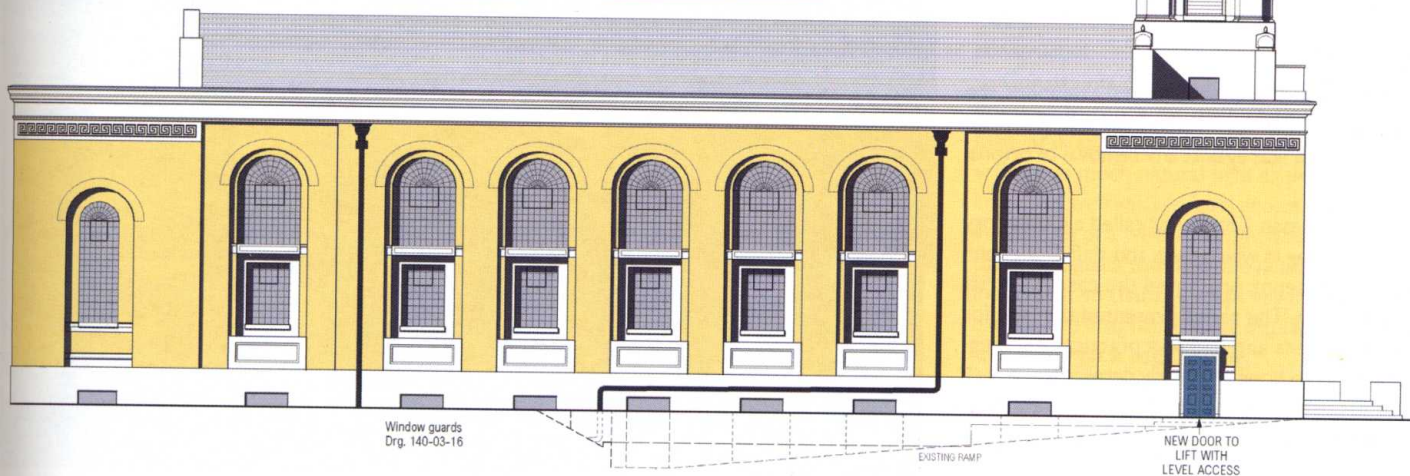
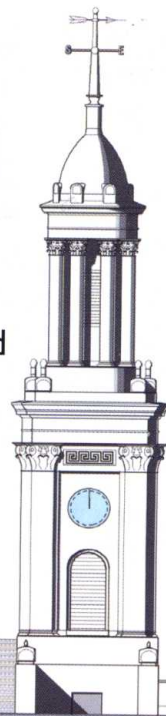
ST PETER WALWORTH

soane's crypt is truly 'in-spired'

By Nicholas Weedon, of Russell Hanslip Associates; and Revd Giles Goddard



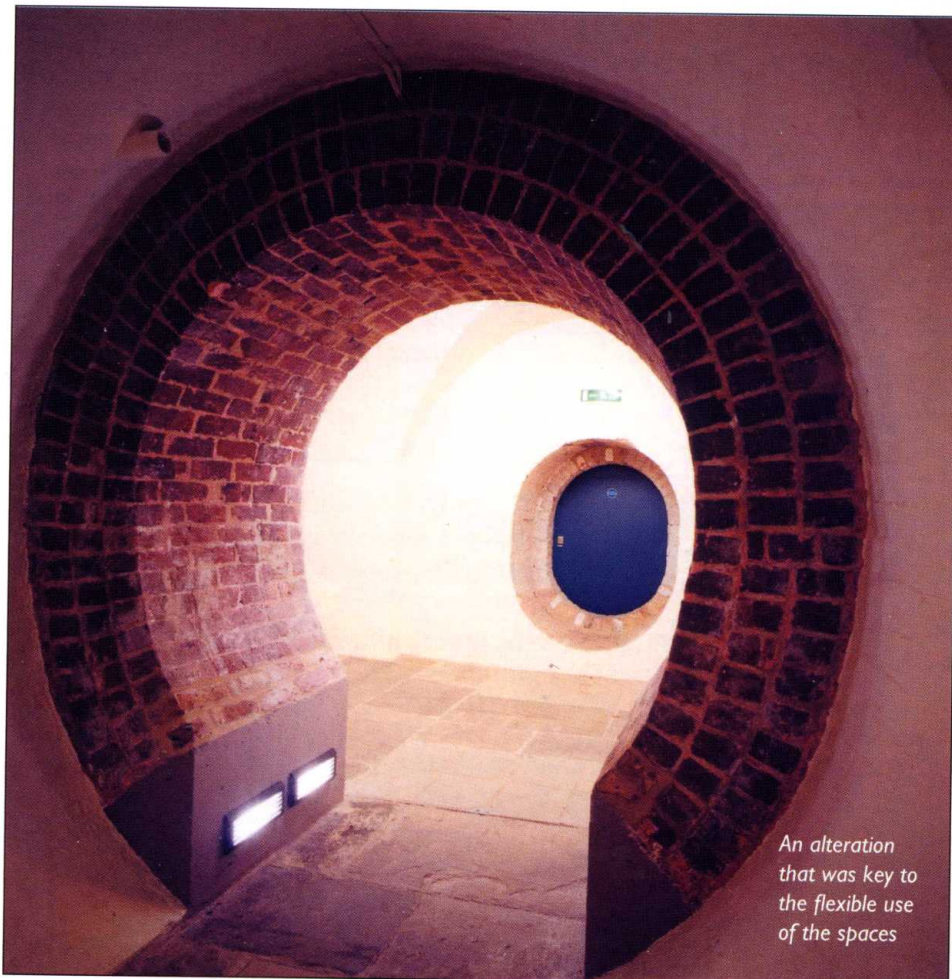
Far left: Old hall;
Centre left: New hall;
Left: Arts room



ST PETER'S is the best preserved of the three churches designed by Sir John Soane while he was an advisor to the Church Building Commission. The exterior elevations display an elegant austerity with elements common to the Dulwich Picture Gallery. The interior of the church is intricately designed yet retains the austerity for which Soane is known. The raked galleries are reached by two matching staircases of exceptional quality featuring cantilevered stairs, unbroken handrails and columnar screens, writes *NICHOLAS WEEDON*.

The crypt is a splendid example of early 19th century brickwork engineering. The central area, defined by large piers and arches, was originally used for above ground "burials". Around the perimeter, separated from the columbarium by a very unusual series of circular relieving arches, are long vaulted galleries, lit and ventilated through small semi-circular wells.

The previous fitting out – dating from the 1970's – and the building services, had reached the end of their serviceable life. Also affected by chronic damp, the space was barely used by the mid-1990s. Our brief for the crypt was for the establishment of "InSpire", a full-time centre for "Learning, Arts and Community". It called for meeting rooms, a hall large enough for group activities, kitchen, WCs, administrative space, a crèche, renewal of the building services and meeting the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act.



An alteration that was key to the flexible use of the spaces

